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ABSTRACT

Concepts of existential/phenomenology philosophy more closely reflect women's experience of the world and provide a better base for a feminist science of psychology. Womens' experience includes basic cooperation, nurturance, empathy, and egalitarian morality. Logical positivist psychology discriminates against women by excluding inner experiencing as a subject matter for study and phenomenological exploration as a method of inquiry. Concepts from existential/phenomenology philosophy which are basic ways of being for humans include: (1) "existence precedes essence"; (2) the human's "being-in-the-world" as essentially relational and interactional; (3) "process" vs. "content" variables (Gendlin); and (4) the phenomenological methodology of grounding theoretical concepts in felt experiencing rather than logical deduction or empirical observation. Existential/phenomenological philosophy taps into variables basic to women's experience of the world and is a valid starting point for future theoretical work. (Author/RC)

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EXISTENTIAL/PHENOMENOLOGY AS A PHILOSOPHICAL BASE FOR A FEMINIST PSYCHOLOGY

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For my purposes today, I am aiming at a legitimization, especially for us as scientists, of the "feminine" way of being. This paper is one in praise of the "concrete": woman's subjectivity; her self as situational, relational, inextricably bound to a world of feeling, intuition, and relationship. I quote Marya Mannes, woman writer: "Women are accused of taking things personally. I cannot see any other honest way of taking them."

At least one subject matter for a feminist psychology must be a study of the world as experienced by woman, which I claim is a world of feeling, intuition, relationship, empathy, and, as Gilligan (1977) has described, a non-violent morality grounded, not in an abstract definition of the good, but in a felt unity with all people, a felt sense of the equality of all people. I see the task of the feminist movement at this point as the avoidance of war and the quest for equality and dignity for all people, not simply the equality of women in work and pay, and I see a need for psychologists to articulate and become able to teach the feminine qualities of empathy, cooperation, nurturance, and egalitarian morality. These values are found as central in feminist utopias, worlds imagined out of a feminine way of being, such as Gilmore's Herland (1979), Bryant's The Kin of Ata Are Waiting for You (1971), Gearhart's The Wanderground (1979), and Lessing's Canopus in Argos: The Marriage Between

Zones Three, Four, and Five (1980). I believe it is a task of feminist psychologists to bring these concepts out of the realm of our literature and into the realm of our science. A question for psychology then becomes: what is the nature of the human being such that her or his defining characteristics include myth, ritual, empathy, cooperation, an experience of the God within, energy, body, the psychic? What are the factors operating when human beings behave other than in these ways?

The argument I am addressing is that between logical positivist vs. existential/phenomenological frames for looking at human being. There are many philosophers of science more able to argue the issues than I. My task is to identify the struggle as a feminist one, to argue that, as presently construed, logical positivist psychology discriminates against woman in at least two ways:

(1) it excludes inner experiencing as a subject matter for study;

(2) it excludes phenomenological exploration as a method of inquiry.

I would like to share with you some concepts from existentialism and phenomenology which have helped to validate my experience as a woman. These concepts provided words or frames which for the first time articulated experiences of mine which never seemed talked about anywhere, either in my training as a psychologist or in my general life in the culture, concepts such as the primacy of feeling and intuition as ways of knowing the world, the human body as inherently relational and interactional, human experiencing as preverbal, preconceptual, and

bodily. I contrast these concepts with those arising from the logical positivist philosophy underlying most of our science today -- concepts which describe the human being as sensation, cognition, affect, behavior, drives, needs, perception, instinct. I do not find myself in these terms.

I would like to introduce you especially to the work of Eugene Gendlin, philosopher-psychologist at the University of Chicago. Many of my distinctions about the philosophy of science are drawn from his work. My particular contribution has been to use them as a verification of woman's experiencing. I have available a bibliography of his work and I recommend it to you.

Gendlin's theory is experiential, in the same sense that the best of feminist literature is experiential. He has developed a theory out of reference to his own felt experiencing, rather than out of logical deduction or behavioral observation, and the theory makes concepts for felt experiencing. Out of his theory has been developed the Experiencing Scale (Klein, Mathieu, Gendlin & Kiesler, 1969). The Experiencing Scale is a step toward measuring the degree to which someone's experiencing process is structure-bound, e.g., caught and rigidified in abstractions vs. experiential, e.g.,a flexible back and forth between felt experiencing and the words, images, and behaviors used to embody it. Flexibility in moving between experiencing and symbols has been shown, tentatively, to be related to female gender

(Kiesler, 1969)*, and to be related to creativity (Gendlin, Beebe, Cassens, Klein, and Oberlander, 1968) and the ability to profit from psychotherapy (Rogers, 1967). I believe that the theory of experiencing provides tools for defining and measuring intuitiveness and subjectivity in a positive way.

I would now like to go through some of the basic characteristics of the feminine as I have described it, and show how concepts from existential/phenomenology confirm these ways of being as basic for human beings. Notice that I say human beings, both male and female. There is a hypothesis here that, if many people are not functioning in these ways, it is, at least in part, because our cultural conditioning in the arenas of physical violence, aggression, and competition has necessitated becoming cut off from the body as a source of feelings and intuition. Since, as I will attempt to demonstrate below, these bodily experiences are also the source of one's feeling of relationship to the world, we have thereby also become cut off from our feeling of empathy for, and a sense of moral responsibility for, other people. In the principles below, I will be taking a stab at proving the existence of feeling and its legitimacy as the ground for phenomenological methodology. By feeling, I do not mean the affect or emotion of logical positivism, but the ongoing background of felt meaning that is basic to human existence.

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* This study shows a nonsignificant trend toward a positive relationship between flexible experiencing and female gender. Further research to confirm this trend is needed. I also have some concern that the Experiencing Scale, although the best measure of Gendlin's experiencing concept to date, and one of the best known clinical predictors of success in psychotherapy, is not totally true to Gendlin's conception of experiencing as a process. Because of the scale's reliance upon verbal content, it may not be an accurate measure of the higher levels of experiencing, where flexibility in the process of moving between symbols and felt experiencing is the distinguishing factor.

Principle One: Feeling and intuition are basic existents.

Woman experiences herself as at one with the world, a process, not static roles or units.

The first thing existential philosophy did was simply to point to the existence of feeling and intuition as a substratum of human being, a source of knowing. Sartre, rebelling against the philosophy of his time, cried, "Existence precedes essence." He was saying, basically: Philosophers talk about concepts, go from one concept, one abstraction to another, play logical games with concepts and even begin to think that the concepts, the ideas, the abstractions they have created are the real thing, are the way that reality is given for human beings. This is not so. Underneath and before any of these concepts, and implicit in the nature of this concept-making animal, is a more basic and preceding reality: the human being's experience of being a continuous self, the knowing of one's existence simply through experiencing one's own ongoingness.

As one function of this ongoingness, this being makes concepts, ideas, abstractions, and observations about reality, but, before all of these concepts, and more real, more basic, is the "maker" of the concepts, the human being as a process of existing. At this level, there is no subject-object split, no mind-body split, but a preverbal, preconceptual, bodily stream of feeling and intuition. Sartre calls this "existence." Gendlin calls it "experiencing," and "felt meaning", defined as "the (directly referred to) 'feel' of some situation, concept, object,

personal relationship, content, or the like" (1962, p. 244, fn. 9). The existence of feeling can be proven through direct reference to felt experiencing. If you were to pause for a moment, and turn your attention inward to your sense of your self as existing, you could verify the existence of felt meaning through this direct reference.

Principle Two: The body is a source of knowledge about the world.

Woman experiences herself as located in her body, and, through it, as co-extensive with nature, with the human community. The existentialists, particularly Merleau-Ponty (1963), say that the human being experiences existence through the body, that the substratum of existence is the same as body. They argue that the "unconscious" is not a psychological entity, a compartment of mind, but is simply the body, the organism's way of carrying knowledge before it is made into concepts. If one is out of touch with body, one will lose touch with the meaningfulness of symbols.

Principle Three: The body is inherently relational.

Woman experiences herself as a part of other people. She lives in a world of empathy, concern with relational climate.

The body, "existence" as ongoingness, the substratum of feeling and intuition, is also shown, particularly in the work of Heidegger (1962) and Buber (1958), to be inherently interactional and interrelational. The "body" as experienced is no envelope of skin separating me from the world. Heidegger says there is no "human being" as a separate or separable entity; there is only "being-in-the-world," the human being as implicitly and by nature an interaction.

Martin Buber (I have lost the reference for this paraphrase), describes this lack of boundary between inside and outside, using the example of a fish. At the gills, the fish is the water, the exchange of molecules of oxygen and carbon dioxide. There is no fish as existent without the water. Water is part of its definition as a living organism. Likewise, while there may be a physical body, there is no human being without an interactional and interpersonal world. Here we have a verification of woman's experience of being inextricably bound to the world through empathy. Here is a ground for woman's tendency to be situation-bound, concrete, personal, subjective. As Gilligan (1977) has begun to show, it is just this situation-boundness, this tie to the rest of the world through feeling, which grounds her morality in feelings for herself and for others, in concerns for non-violence and equality for all.

Here, also, we have a philosophical basis for woman's experience of being primordially interested in interpersonal relationships, rather than (or, I would say, in addition to) abstract ideas and things. Because she is open to and aware of her bodily experiencing, the interrelational nature of experiencing is continuously available to her as a ground for the making of concepts. If you are aware of your feelings, you will be aware of relationships or relational events, because feelings are relationships. Feelings are always at, or toward, or in relationship to other people and other things.

Woman turns her thinking toward her inner experiencing, and she finds there feelings and intuitions, not as intrapsychic, subjective contents, but as a nexus of interaction between herself and world. This substratum of feeling and intuitions, which Gendlin (1962) calls "felt meaning" is a valid source of knowledge, not just about ourselves, but about the world, about our situations, about other people, with whom it is coterminous.

I would now like to claim that some of woman's ways of being-in-the-world are synonomous with a phenomenological methodology, as drawn from Husserl and explicated by Gendlin (1962), particularly:

(a) the acceptance of inner experiencing as real;

(b) the acceptance of direct reference to felt experiencing as a ground for determining truth or falsity;

(c) the demand that concepts be grounded in concrete experiencing, rather than abstraction.

It is important to say here that I am not taking the tack of some phenomenologists and humanists of throwing out all of science as we know it for a new methodology or for no science at all, as the case may be. It is at the level of the development of variables and the measures for studying them, that I want to intervene. It is my contention, and as it has been articulated by Gendlin (1962), that, once we have explicated humanly meaningful variables and have created measures which are true reflections of the processes underlying these phenomena, then these variables and measures can enter into the theoretical hypotheses and empirical experiments of logical positivist science. The methodology

I am proposing is also different from some phenomenological attempts to read off inner events as pure experience. I am seeing the felt sense, the bodily feel of a situation, as the key for the unfolding of the relationship between the human being and outer, observable situations.

I would like to outline the proposed methodology:

To be meaningful for psychology, variables must be developed out of and refer back to felt experiencing. As I have described above, felt experiencing is not simply intrapsychic, but is the location of the interaction between the human being and situations. Variables developed out of abstract theory or out of observation of human behavior will be lacking in this context of human meaningfulness.

This means that the starting point of any psychological exploration should be somebody's felt sense of a phenomenon. If it is true that women live in intimate contact with their ongoing experiencing, then every woman must be a wealth of such rich phenomenological distinctions. The first step for woman as psychologist is simply to turn her attention toward her felt experiencing, toward her inner sensing of a phenomenon that grips her strongly, in a feeling way, and to begin to try to articulate the feeling, to make words for it in such a way that it can be verified, as a specific phenomenological distinction, in the inner experiencing of other people. This is the phenomenological methodology of Husserl: the articulation of a phenomenon, a human distinction, such that another person can verify the

existence of this phenomenon by finding it in his or her own felt experiencing. Gendlin (1962) calls it direct reference to felt experiencing, a third method of inquiry, equal in its importance to the pursuit of truth through logic or through experiment. I would like to see it used at the point of the development of variables and their measures in psychology.

I believe that this is the import of Gilligan's "In A Different Voice: Women's Conceptions of Self and Morality" (1977) -- not simply the pointing out of another possible gender difference, but the creation of this distinction, not out of theory or experiment, but from direct reference to her own felt experiencing. Kohlberg's categories of moral development do not fit our experience as women. The problem is not in the logical consistency of the theory nor in the reliability and validity of the empirical studies which grew out of it, but in terms of the third method of inquiry, Husserl's phenomenological test for truth, the ability of the other person to find the concept in her or his own felt experiencing. It is to Gilligan's credit that she held on to and pursued the articulation of this distinction in inner experiencing, in moral decision-making as experienced, at least by women. In doing so, she is on her way toward developing a variable, and eventually a measure, which will be tied to a phenomenon as humanly meaningful. Yet I have not seen evidence that APA journals would publish such a paper, which simply makes the phenomenological distinction, or that there would be funding support for the time needed to articulate such a distinction and to develop a meaningful measure for it. In psychology, the pressure is for hard data, empirical findings.

It is important to point out here that moral decision-making, as Gilligan (1977) has described it, is an experiencing of self and others, an experiencing of human being in a situation, not an intrapsychic phenomenon. Because of the interrelational nature of felt experiencing, as I have described above, such experienced phenomena, when explicated or symbolized in words, will not be about sheer intrapsychic events, but will be a mirror of the relationship between human and world. They will be feelings about situations, other people, events. Since this presumed intrasubjectivity has been the greatest argument against the validity of felt experiencing as a source of knowledge for science, let me give an example of how a felt sense, when articulated, describes a relationship that can be observed through the methods of empirical science:

When I did my doctoral dissertation, I wanted to study a terrible feeling that I had in some decision-making groups and not in others. In some groups, I felt unable to speak, my body was tense, I felt crushed down. Since some of these groups were women's movement groups, I was concerned about this negative effect upon group members. In exploring this felt sense, by making words for my experience, by trying to identify what was happening interactionally in groups when I felt crushed down vs. free to speak, and by comparing the theory and research of others with my felt sense of the phenomenon, I eventually came up with a hypothesis about an inverse relationship between aggressive, competitive turn-taking behavior, and the ability of group members to

contribute from intuitive, preverbal experiencing, and, thereby, to find creative, alternative solutions

for group conflicts. I measured the functional relationship between interruptions, an operational definition of competition, and pauses during speaking turns, an operational definition of direct reference to felt experiencing (Boukydis, 1975). As interruptions decreased, pauses increased. I used a multiple baseline design from behavior analysis. What could be more in line with the current methodologies of our science? Yet I was measuring a phenomenon arrived at, initially, not through deduction from a theory or through empirical observation, but through exploration of a feeling. You may say that this is the first step in much research, but I claim that, because it is seen as a prescientific, intuitive activity, the support needed to develop this method, which I will call "explication of felt meaning," into a legitimate method of inquiry, and to arrive at the humanly tied variables and measures it could generate, are not granted.

I'd like to give a last example of the way in which theory, as a schema for understanding reality, can function to call up felt experiencing, but how the step at that point is to set aside the theory and to articulate the uncovered phenomenon as a distinction in felt experiencing:

Many feminists are presently finding that object-relations theory is in some way resonating with their felt experiencing. Yet there is a conflict here around accepting a psychoanalytically-based explanation for feminine experience. The task here is, not

to get caught in the theoretical abstractions of that theory, but to articulate the felt experiencing in each of us which has been brought to light, or called up more clearly, by this theoretical schema. The step is to stop and say, "What is it in my own experiencing that is touched or articulated by this theory?" and to focus into, or to sense into, that feeling and then to very carefully make words for it. When you have articulated this felt referent in your own words, you will be on the way to defining a variable that will be drawn, not from theoretical deduction, but from a very specific interaction between outer events and human experiencing. Your measures will have a high construct validity because they will be tested by their ability to refer back to the specific phenomena. You will end up with measures of an actual human experience, rather than measures of contents which are hypothesized to exist in the human being because of the logic of someone's theoretical construction of reality. You will be doing research on something that is personally and humanly meaningful. Your work should also call forth more clearly some aspect of human experiencing, rather than further obscuring experiencing by defining and narrowing it according to pre-determined categories.

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